

TO Our Dallas Reading Room

KENNEDY SLAIN ON DALLAS STREET

JOURNAL WRITERS' REMINISCENCE



Reporting a heartbreak

1230 p.m. Friday, November 22, 1963.

"We turned off Main Street and onto Houston for the last leg of the motorcade route to the Trade Mart. . . We saw the president's car make the turn on Elm in front of the Texas School Book Depository Building, getting a bit of speed. The press car was halfway down the block before the left turn when the first shots rang out. "What the hell was that?" one of us asked."

That begins Bob Baskin's account of a tragic moment in American history — the assassination in Dallas of President John F. Kennedy — which would be followed, unbelievably, two days later by the murder of his accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, in a shooting that was witnessed by a national television audience.

Baskin, now retired, was chief of The Dallas Morning News Washington Bureau at that time. His account of the assassination, and the personal stories of other members of The News staff, are woven together in a gripping narrative by East Bille. The account of the historic days shows newsmen in pursuit of a story that would be, for most of them, the most important they ever covered. Bille was one of those reporters.

The personal accounts were written 15 years ago, after the assassination and its aftermath, at the behest of Jack Kruger, then managing editor of The News, now retired. Until now, they have been unpublished.

From the accounts, Bille has woven a story that gives new dimensions to that bigger event, of reporters at work on something that was affecting them as deeply as it would affect the readers.

"Newspapermen may seem callous to some people because of their apparent detachment in covering tragedy," wrote Bill Rives, then assistant managing editor. "This is neither a fact nor a pose. It simply is an essential characteristic of persons in the business. No one knew — or won't unless they read this — that I cracked up one night at home. I didn't know why, but I sobbed uncontrollably for hours. . ."